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SEX, DRUGS

The Shocking Search for an "Ultimate"

by John Marks



Richard Helms, Sidney Gottlieb, Allen Dulles—Architects of the CIA's covert drug-testing program

The CIA's venture into control of human behavior—a systematic program of testing LSD on unwitting Americans—began some two decades ago; nevertheless, it remained buried in the agency's secrecy system until the Rockefeller Commission and the Church Committee unearthed its general outlines in 1975. The news stories and headlines about these revelations, however, failed to satisfy freelance reporter John Marks; and he began a three-year search for the details that would flesh out the tale surrounding the CIA's mind-control programs. Through the Freedom of Information Act, he turned up some 16,000 pages of CIA documents, most of which agency officials had not furnished to executive-branch or Senate investigators; and he continued by interviewing numerous people directly involved. Many of the CIA's secrets, he says, will always be effectively protected by some agency officers. But Marks himself succeeded in penetrating the shadowy intrigue that cloaked CIA testing of mind-altering drugs. The story he was able to piece together is presented here.

FOR BETTER OR WORSE, LSD came to America in 1949, when the counterculture generation that the drug eventually symbolized was not even out of the nursery. At the time, the CIA and the military intelligence agencies were just setting out on their quest for drugs and other exotic methods to take possession of people's minds. The ancient desire to control enemies through magical spells and potions had come alive again, and several offices within the CIA competed to become the head controllers.

The agency's Technical Services Staff (TSS) was one of these offices; at the time, it was officially meant to be investigating the use of chemical and biological warfare (CBW) in covert operations. TSS was part of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), and its specialists furnished back-up equipment for secret operations: false papers,

bugs, tapes, suicide pills, explosive sea shells, transmitters hidden in false teeth, cameras in tobacco pouches, invisible inks, and the like. In later years, these gadget wizards from TSS would become known for supplying some of history's more ridiculous landmarks, such as Howard Hunt's ill-fitting red wig, but in the early days of the CIA, they gave promise of transforming the spy world.

Within TSS, there existed a chemical division with functions that few others, even in TSS, knew about. These functions concerned the use of chemicals (and germs) against specific people. From 1951 to 1956, the year when the CIA's interest in LSD peaked, Sidney Gottlieb, a native of the Bronx with a Ph.D. in chemistry from Cal Tech, headed this division. Only 33 years old when he took over the Chemical Division, Gottlieb had nonetheless gained the respect of his colleagues, who described him as willing to carry out, as one ex-associate puts it, "the tough things that had to be done."

At the top ranks of the Clandestine Services (officially called the Directorate of Operations, but popularly known as the "dirty tricks" department) Sid Gottlieb had a champion who appreciated his qualities—Richard Helms. For two decades, Gottlieb would move to progressively higher positions in the wake of Helms's climb to the highest position in the agency. Gottlieb was loyal, and he followed orders. Although many people lay in the chain of command between the two men, Helms preferred to avoid bureaucratic niceties and deal directly with Gottlieb.

On April 3, 1953, Helms proposed to CIA Director Allen Dulles that the agency set up a program under Gottlieb for "covert use of biological and chemical materials." Helms said that the program would be used in "present and future clandestine operations" and added that the capabilities acquired would "enable us to defend ourselves against a foe who might not be as restrained in the use of

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